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“The Ride of Paul Revere”

Response by the Rev. Charles R. Brown at
the Banquet of the Sons of the American
Revolution, San Francisco, Feb. 22, 1899

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TO "THE SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION":

Gentlemen—A few weeks after our last celebration of Washington's Birthday, one of the officers of our Society said to me that if I would get the Rev. Charles R. Brown to write out his excellent speech on that happy occasion, he would see that it was printed by the Society for distribution among its members. I transmitted the request to Mr. Brown. As he is the possessor of a wonderful memory, he was able, though some weeks had elapsed, to recall and write out his speech. I then sent it to the gentleman who requested it. A few days ago he returned it with the statement that it had been decided not to print the speech unless the last three pages were left out. The reason given for the proposed mutilation was that the part to be omitted contained sentiments not in accord with the views of a majority of the "Sons," and to publish that part would imply disapproval of the policy of the Government.

I am not ready to believe that a majority of the descendants of Revolutionary sires are unwilling to hear what an able, patriotic, and devoted American has to say in respect to applying principles, for which our fathers fought, to the difficult problem before us. Nor can I believe that the sons of fathers who contended, as against their mother country, for their political freedom, are willing, in any considerable numbers, to countenance the taking away from another and foreign people, even though only half-civilized and dark of skin, that political liberty which we claim for ourselves. The sons of our noble sires are certainly not afraid to read the discussions of the basic principles of our institutions, and are not afraid to apply them to new questions that arise.

The Constitution of our Society declares that one of our objects is: "To inspire among the members and the community at large "a more profound reverence for the *principles* of the Government "founded by our fathers."

Surely the discussion of those principles by earnest and able men is always in order.

We all love to be amused and are attracted to an able, witty, and eloquent speaker. Those of us who heard Mr. Brown's speech were delighted with it. Not all who listened to him agreed with him upon the application of certain elementary principles to the matter in hand, but all did agree in commending the fine tone of the speech and the bearing of the reverend gentleman.

Therefore, as I am unwilling that this address should be mutilated or forgotten, I beg to present it to you in pamphlet form, with the hope that its reading will give you pleasure. I also hope that it may cause some of our members to pause and reflect, whether the principles our ancestors contended for were applicable only to them and their descendants, or were universal truths. Can a people be bought or sold without their consent? Shall we disregard the Golden Rule and the Declaration of Independence in our treatment of the Filipinos?

SAN FRANCISCO, May 11, 1899.

WARREN OLNEY.

“THE RIDE OF PAUL REVERE.”

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN: I presume I owe the honor of this invitation to your hospitable board to-night partly to the fact that for four years I lived on Monument Square in Charlestown, just across the street from Bunker Hill Monument. The afternoon sun used to cast the shadow of the great monument across the page where I wrote or read at my study desk, so that if I have failed to contract the spirit of patriotism, it is not for lack of being properly “exposed.” While residing there I heard an account of the battle of Bunker Hill, not from an eye-witness,—I got around too late for that, through no fault of mine,—but from the next best man. I walked about the hill and heard Charles Carleton Coffin, who wrote the “Boys of ’76,” the “Boys of ’61,” and who was war-correspondent for the *Boston Journal* during the Civil War, indicate the various points of interest, and give a graphic account of the battle. As a boy, in his father’s kitchen, he had heard it all described by two old men who were there, and who fought under Warren and saw him fall. Mr. Coffin’s vivid description seemed to people the old hill again with its splendid heroes, and in the quiet night-time I could look

out from my window and almost fancy that the spirits of your Revolutionary sires had come back to talk over the wonderful results of those struggles on the very scene of conflict.

But you have asked me to say something about "The Ride of Paul Revere." He was an engraver by trade, and he made the plates from which the first Continental money was printed. He was celebrated for his many rides. He was the messenger who carried to Philadelphia the news of that memorable occasion when certain patriotic gentlemen made a tea-pot of Boston Harbor, and invited the codfish and herring of that section of the Atlantic Coast to come and drink tea at British expense. It was Paul Revere who brought the news from the Continental Congress at Philadelphia to Boston, approving the action of the Suffolk Conference. Indeed, he was always "booted and spurred and ready to ride."

He was a man who had traveled, not always on horse-back, but sometimes on foot, "neither barefoot nor shod." A few years ago it was my great privilege to address a body of brother Masons on the 17th of June, the anniversary of the Battle of Bunker Hill, in old Faneuil Hall, where they met to honor the memory of Paul Revere, one of the Past Grand Masters of Massachusetts. By many such observances as these, the Sons of the Revolution in the old Bay State keep the hearts of our own generation warm with the fires of patriotism kindled more than a century ago.

But the special ride of which I am asked to speak was the ride from Charlestown to Lexington and Concord "on

the eighteenth of April, 'seventy-five.' On the anniversary of that occasion a few years ago, the city of Boston celebrated the event by causing two lanterns to be hung again "in the belfry-tower of the Old North Church." And the moment the lights shone out, a man started from the Charlestown shore and rode through the night out to Medford, and on to Lexington and Concord. Families sat at their windows watching the road until the swift horseman appeared, and then, as he dashed by, told the story again to their wondering children.

All these customs and observances tend to make that period of our national history real and inspiring to the growing boys and girls. I have been told that these realistic methods of instruction have been carried so far in the public schools of Boston that the following composition was once handed in by a promising boy. The class had been taught the history of the discovery of America, and then asked to write it up in their own language, and in their own way. This was one boy's effort:—

"C'LUMBUS"

"C'lumbus was a man who knew a lot of things about the earth. One day the King of Spain said to him, "C'lumbus, do you suppose you could discover America?" "I suppose I could" said C'lumbus, "if you'd give me a ship." So the King of Spain gave C'lumbus a ship, and he sailed and sailed in the d'rection where he thought America was. The sailors did n't believe there was any such place, and one day they mutinied and wanted to throw C'lumbus in. But he said, "Wait till to-morrow." The next day the sailors came to him and said, "C'lumbus, we see land." "Then that is America," said C'lumbus. When they got to the land, the shore was covered with black men. "Is this

America," said C'lumbus? "Yes" they said "it is." "Then I suppose you are the niggers," said C'lumbus? "Yes we are" they said. And they asked him, "Are you C'lumbus?" He said "Yes sir I am." And then they turned to each other and said, "There is no help for it; we are discovered at last."

But returning from the realism that appears in these youthful conceptions of history, to Paul Revere's Ride, I was about to say that the whole road he covered between Charlestown and Lexington is holy ground. It is a sacred pilgrimage for any country-loving American citizen to traverse it to-day. It is dotted all along with memorial stones indicating points where the militia withstood the British regulars, or where some of the brave Colonists fell. The old Powder House, Cooper's Tavern, and the identical house used as a hospital after the Battle at Lexington, are all still standing on that famous road.

I have been deeply interested in visiting fields where some of the decisive and notable battles of the world have been fought. I have stood on the heights at Stirling and looked down on the field of Bannockburn, where Robert Bruce won his victory for the independence of Scotland; I have tramped about the field of Waterloo, where Wellington and the Allies fought out the principle of absolutism with Napoleon; I have toiled through the sand of Egypt on the field where Napoleon looked up and inspired his soldiers by reminding them that forty centuries looked down upon them; I have ridden horseback across the Plain of Esdraelon, the classic battle-ground of Scripture, where the people of Israel vanquished the idolatrous Canaanites,

where sturdy Gideon with his illustrious three hundred put to flight the host of Midian, where Saul grappled with the Philistines, where Pompey's legions drove back the despairing Hebrews, and where the Moslem general, Saladin, brought grievous defeat to the advancing hosts of Christian Crusaders. All these are notable situations, and the historic memories that hover about such fields are deeply impressive. But as a student of history, and as a lover of my race, I am here to say that to me there is no more sacred ground anywhere than that little village green at Lexington, where fifty American patriots, drawn up under command of Captain John Parker, faced the regiment of British regulars. Their leader seemed to realize the prophetic significance of their position as he uttered those ringing words, "Don't fire unless you are fired upon: but if they want war it may as well begin here." To-night we honor, and shall forever honor, those village patriots who bravely stood their ground for liberty!

You remember the circumstances that led up to the celebrated ride. The British Government had ordered the arrest of those two "arch-conspirators," Sam Adams and John Hancock. These men had been staying at the house of the Rev. Jonas Clark in Lexington. It always rejoices me to read that one of my brethren of the cloth was so well occupied, in thus entertaining these leaders in those stirring times. Troops were to be dispatched from Boston to arrest these two men at Lexington, and then to go on and destroy the military stores which the Colonists had been accumulating at Concord. The lines from Long-

fellow's verse, descriptive of the situation, naturally occur to us all:—

“Listen, my children, and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,
On the eighteenth of April, in 'seventy-five,—
Hardly a man is now alive,
Who remembers that famous day and year.

“He said to his friend, ‘If the British march
By land or sea from the town to-night,
Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry-arch
Of the Old North Church, as a signal light,—
One if by land, and two if by sea;
And I on the opposite shore will be
Ready to ride and spread the alarm
Through every Middlesex village and farm,
For the country folk to be up and to arm.’

“Then he said, ‘Good-night,’ and with muffled oar
Silently rowed to the Charlestown shore,
Just as the moon rose over the bay,
Where swinging wide at her moorings lay,
The Somerset, British man-of-war.”

When the signal was given from the church-tower, Paul Revere rode to Lexington, and to the house of the Rev. Jonas Clark, where Sam Adams and John Hancock were sleeping. The town was quickly aroused, and by daylight Captain Parker was ready with his minutemen drawn up on the green to receive the British. The bullet-holes made that day in the houses around the green are still pointed out, and the pistol which Pitcairn, the British officer, fired when he called out, “Disperse, you rebels!” is preserved in the town library of Lexington.

Paul Revere pressed on to Concord, giving the alarm to the patriots, and they were ready to defend the munitions of war stored in that place. The spot where the fighting took place in Concord is marked now by the fine statue of "the Minute Man," in the act of leaving the plow, with his flint-lock and powder horn. The whole scene has been pictured in these lines of Emerson:—

"By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flags to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood,
And fired the shot heard round the world."

What glorious days they were ! No period of our history will more richly repay the student of those fundamental principles that lie at the foundation of true national greatness ! As we gather around these tables to-night, and as our minds revert to those events, there are two points especially to which I desire to refer.

In the first place, there is something splendid about the fact that the presence of a common foe instantly unites the American people. The early Colonists had their differences and their jealousies. The Puritans had certain ideas about the use of the State for the advancement of some of their extreme views in religion, which were anything but agreeable to the Dutchmen of New York. The Cavaliers of Virginia were far more interested in fighting, and in war, than were the peaceful Quakers of Pennsylvania. But when the hour struck by the presence of a foreign foe, the various sections came together. With a wisdom that was truly statesman-like, a Virginia colonel of militia was put at the head of the

New England troops when the hostilities began. To the temporary disappointment of John Hancock and others, George Washington, whose memory we have come here to honor to-night, became the man to lead the armies of the thirteen colonies, and finally to weld those colonies into a nation.

The heart of the great American people is all right. They have made blunders, they have been misled by politicians, they have been slow sometimes in recognizing the things that belonged to their peace, but deep down they have certain sentiments and convictions that are eternally right. A common peril brings the opposing sections into an effective and united line. If any one had said twelve months ago that General Joe Wheeler would get out of his sick bed to go and fight side by side with the Yankees under the Stars and Stripes, or that a Republican President would go down South and talk about the importance of educating the negro into a useful citizen and be cheered to the echo, he would have been set down as a fool. And yet we have witnessed these very spectacles with unspeakable satisfaction. The North and the South have not always thought alike in all points of their political creed, and they do not think just alike now. The East and the West, taking them by and large, are not entirely of one mind touching the matter of the currency, and touching several other vital issues. But far down underneath these differences of opinion, there is a great sense of unity and of loyal attachment to a common body of principles, a great, warm American heart which beats as one, North, South, East, and West; and it is this that gives us

a mighty confidence in the stability of our institutions and the perpetuity of our national life.

The other point to which I wish to refer, is the essential and intelligent democracy evinced in that whole uprising. Every man in line on the village green at Lexington, or intrenched at Bunker Hill, knew what he was there for. It was no mere showy dream, born of exultant enthusiasm, that had carried him into the army. He could have analyzed his political feelings back to their constituent principles and have given you a reason for the hearty faith that was in him, making him a citizen soldier. God save us from the day when that shall ever be changed! God save us from the day of great standing armies, of men hired to fight, neither knowing nor caring why, save that war is their trade!

Already, as it seems to some of us, we are in peril. I am not sure that this will prove to be popular talk; but I presume when you invite a man here, you want him to speak his mind honestly and frankly. I wonder how many of our soldiers yonder around Manila to-night, know why they are there shooting naked savages! What deep underlying principle of political justice makes it necessary for them to be there at all? I listen soberly while ministers of the Gospel tell us that we are doing it in the interests of "Christian civilization." I read slowly when jubilant newspapers speak in glowing terms about the spread of a "beneficent Anglo-Saxon imperialism." Perhaps I am old-fashioned, but I cannot make it seem right. In the glorious days of which we have been talking to-night, we

fought a greater and a stronger nation, because we claimed the right to govern the soil on which we lived. And now, by a strange inversion of our ideas, we are fighting the helpless Filipinos, because, forsooth, they claim the same right! Taxation without representation in those days was tyranny when applied to us. Now, by some shuffling of terms, it is to be called "philanthropy," and "benevolent assimilation," when applied by us to a race weaker than ourselves. I am forced to believe that some of the propositions put forward in these days as "up-to-date American doctrine," would be sadly confusing to such simple and orthodox old patriots as Sam Adams and George Washington.

I believe that I am a good American. I am not in any sense "a recent arrival." My ancestors landed in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607, and had their trunks unpacked and their housekeeping arrangements all in good running order when the Pilgrim Fathers got along in 1620. And we are here to stay. I do not know just how it will be with your posterity; but when the twentieth century shall have come and shall have gone, I am confident that in every city directory from Eastport, Maine, to San Diego, California, there will be pages and pages of "Browns."

I love my country, I rejoice in her history, and I glory in her free institutions. For these very reasons I cannot but regret the hour when we seem to turn away from those sublime principles of self-government for ourselves and for the oppressed of every land, and to choose instead the false glitter of these ambitious dreams about "Imperialism." Whenever and however we line up American citi-

zens to fight on behalf of any sort of plan or project that does not embody the idea of a government of the people, for the people, and by the people, exercising their own sovereignty over the soil where they live, we are forgetting those elementary principles that have made us great, and we are bringing confusion into what has been an orderly, consistent record of national progress.

I cannot understand those men who see something grand in transforming our President, hitherto a plain democratic official, into a quasi king, wearing for the inferior races which we shall have conquered a crown of "beneficent imperialism." I cannot understand the desires of those who would turn away from the noble history of a people, homogeneous in home, in language, in allegiance to one religion and in loyalty to one body of democratic principles, governing themselves and offering a place of refuge for the burdened of every land, in order to enter upon the uncertain pathway of expansion into strange and threatening difficulties. They tell us that these old-fashioned American methods have made a certain "Little America," and that now these imported European methods will transform us into a "Greater America." Mr. Chairman, I cannot believe it. The America for which I hope and pray, is an America larger in size, richer in resource, more fertile in opportunity, more powerful as an intellectual and moral force in the world, than was the America of a hundred years ago, but at its heart eternally true to the principles of Paul Revere, of Sam Adams and of John Hancock, of Thomas Jefferson and of the immortal Washington!

The Murdock Press, San Francisco.





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